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Superpower balance a lie, analysts say

By Tom Diaz
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The American public "has been led dangerously astray" by being told U.S. military strength is at least equal to Soviet armed might, two defense analysts contend in a book to be released this week.

Co-authors Quentin Crommelin Jr. and David Sullivan argue that, in fact, the United States has fallen further behind the Soviet Union in military power under the Reagan presidency.

Mr. Sullivan, a former CIA analyst who works as national security adviser to several conservative Republican senators, has written two books on Soviet violations of strategic arms limitation agreements. Mr. Crommelin, a Washington lawyer, was counsel to several members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and also served on the Defense Department transition team for the first Reagan administration.

"Decline in the relative military power of the United States has been continuous and . . . is in fact accelerating," the authors state in "Soviet Military Supremacy."

"We know of nothing tangible since 1980 that has reversed the trend then apparent, notwithstanding millions of empty words to the contrary in countless campaign speeches of the 1984 election," the two wrote.

But a Defense Department spokesman said "we disagree with that" assessment of the relative might of the two superpowers.

"This gets back to various arguments as to numbers vs. quality," he said. "We don't feel that we're inferior to the Soviet military forces. Despite any advantage they may have numerically in some areas, we would still rather have what we've got."

The authors contend that because of "congressional action and inaction, defense spending under President Reagan is far below the levels even President Carter thought were necessary for our safety."

They cite defense spending projections made in 1981 by both Mr. Carter and Mr. Reagan and current actual spending levels in support of that contention.

The two men argue that the Soviet Union "has attained military superiority at every force level." And because of that superiority, they say, the Soviets are "increasingly contemptuous of America and American forces."

In fact, they go so far as to question whether superior Soviet military power has not already forced President Reagan to back down. Pointing to the change from Mr. Reagan's 1980 statement that "the Soviets only see weakness in a president [Jimmy Carter] who clings to the unilateral observance of the fatally flawed SALT II treaty," to the administration's present unilateral observance of the same treaty, they ask:

"How else can our president's total reversal of position on SALT II be rationalized?"

Their book, written under the auspices of the Defense and Strategic Studies Program at the University of Southern California, follows the Pentagon's release earlier this month of its own similarly titled assessment of Soviet strength, "Soviet Military Power."

"One major difference between their book and ours is that the Department of Defense perpetually tries to ameliorate the situation by including NATO and Warsaw Pact forces," Mr. Crommelin said in a recent interview. "We don't. We compare the two superpowers directly.

"If you are talking about the balance of power in a global sense, you can't look at regional forces alone," he said. "We question the assurance that we will have reliable NATO allies throughout the future."

The Pentagon spokesman defended the DOD book on this score, however, saying it is "not illogical to include our allies, unless you think the United States and the Soviet Union could get into a serious conflict without involving our allies."

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